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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and on areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request of the Security Council contained in the statement issued by its President on 14 November 2011 (S/PRST/2011/21), in which the Council requested me to keep it informed of the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and developments in relation to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The present report builds on my report to the Council dated 10 November 2011 (S/2011/704), in which I focused on the activities of UNOCA in carrying out its mandate to coordinate the work of the United Nations system in the Central Africa subregion on issues of peace and security, including peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The present report provides an update on the activities to counter the LRA threat since my previous report on the issue, dated 4 November 2011 (S/2011/693).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion

A. Political and security developments

2. The major political developments during the period under review relate to good governance, elections and security matters and the impact of the Libyan crisis on Central African States, which has affected terrorism and transnational crime, among other things. Difficulties in the free movement of persons throughout Central Africa and issues of law and order and public safety also presented challenges to the subregion.

3. Three Central African countries organized elections during the period under review. The Democratic Republic of the Congo held presidential and legislative elections in November 2011, Gabon conducted parliamentary elections in December 2011 and Chad held local elections in February 2012. While the elections took place in a generally peaceful environment, national stakeholders, opposition parties and international observers raised concerns. These issues need to be addressed by the national authorities as part of efforts to build inclusive and participatory electoral processes. Of concern in several countries in Central Africa are gaps and weaknesses in the legal framework and in the modalities of the organization of

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elections, in particular the electoral laws and the functioning and management of electoral bodies. Without broad consensus among stakeholders on the organization of elections, the outcomes will always be contested, leading to tension and, at worst, conflict. Inclusive and transparent elections are thus a major factor in good governance, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

4. Insecurity in the Sahel region, including the fallout from the crisis in Libya, continued to have a significant negative socioeconomic impact on several Central African countries. The proliferation of weapons and movement of transnational organized criminal and terrorist groups constituted a major threat to peace and stability in those States.

5. Central African countries discussed these challenges during the fifteenth ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS),[1] held on 15 and 16 January 2012, in N'Djamena. Some Central African States also engaged their neighbours in West Africa to develop a collective response to the threats affecting the two subregions. In this regard, the President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, met the President of Chad, Idriss Deby Itno, in April 2012 in N'Djamena. Equally, the collective response to regional insecurity was high on the agenda of the fourteenth summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, held in N'Djamena on 30 April 2012.

6. In their efforts to promote regional integration, Central African countries have developed mechanisms for free movement of persons and goods throughout the subregion. Tensions related to cross-border movements of nationals of member States of ECCAS and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community remained during the period under review, however, with at least one incident resulting in loss of life. UNOCA continued to raise the issue with the relevant authorities, encouraging multilateral and bilateral consultations among States to defuse tension and settle disagreements. In this connection, joint mixed commission meetings were held between Cameroon and Chad, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon during the reporting period.

7. The co-hosting of the twenty-eighth edition of the Africa Cup of Nations football tournament by Equatorial Guinea and Gabon at the beginning of 2012 highlighted the positive role of sport in promoting peace and security on the continent. The African Union and the Confederation of African Football took advantage of the occasion to promote the "Make Peace Happen" campaign, an endeavour to foster understanding, develop positive attitudes among young people and encourage healthy competition and the spirit of fair play. The campaign also aimed at speeding up the implementation of States' commitments to various African Union instruments relating to peace and security.

B. Socioeconomic developments

8. In the annual report of the Economic Commission for Africa on the economic situation in Central Africa (ECA/SRO-CA/ICE/XXVIII/12/PD/01.a), it was indicated that the average economic growth rate in the subregion was 5.2 per cent in 2011,

[1] The member States of ECCAS are Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.

with 5.8 per cent growth forecasted for 2012. Some ECCAS member States recorded double-digit growth rates, in particular the oil-producing countries. This robust economic growth should allow States in the subregion to generate opportunities for their populations and boost poverty alleviation programmes, while consolidating development for all without discrimination.

9. In several countries, however, high economic growth rates have not translated into significant poverty alleviation. In countries with high economic growth rates, there are paradoxical situations where poverty has increased, especially among the poorest segments of the populations in both rural and urban areas. The economic difficulties experienced by the poorest sectors of society, especially in rapidly growing urban areas, are exacerbated by the fact that some major cities in Central Africa are among the most expensive in the world in which to live.

C. Human rights and gender

10. During the period under review, the importance of strengthening the independence of national bodies in charge of human rights continued to be debated throughout Central Africa. Trafficking in persons, especially women and children, continued to be a major concern in a number of countries of the subregion. Furthermore, Central Africa continued to address challenges related to the rights of migrant workers, in a context where most States in the subregion have not yet ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

11. Discrimination against vulnerable groups, including in the area of political participation, remains a major concern. Some countries, notably the Congo, have made encouraging efforts to ensure social integration for indigenous peoples by improving their access to education and health facilities. In many other countries, however, indigenous peoples' access to resources and opportunities remains limited. Persons with disabilities have seen little or no progress in respect of legislative reforms in many countries, with the exception of a national law on the rights of persons with disabilities adopted in Cameroon.

12. Most national human rights bodies in the subregion remained weak and underfunded. Consequently, their overall delivery was limited and their ability to follow up on and implement recommendations of the Human Rights Council after the first cycle of the universal periodic review, in addition to those of other United Nations human rights mechanisms, remained low. The Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, a subsidiary office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), continued to work with national human rights institutions to ensure coordination and compliance with international standards.

D. Cross-border threats

13. The activities of armed groups, the flow of illegal arms and combatants into the subregion, in particular following the Libyan crisis, and the impact of terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram, continued to present a serious challenge to peace and security in the subregion. On 23 January 2012, Chad and the Central African Republic launched joint operations against military positions of the Front

populaire pour le redressement, an armed group operating in the Central African Republic. The operation was relatively successful but failed to eliminate the threat completely.

14. Some countries in the subregion experienced growing insecurity and instability because of the influx of sophisticated weapons and armed groups from Libya. Given the links of some armed groups to terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, this phenomenon has the potential to destabilize the entire subregion.

15. Boko Haram recently increased its attacks beyond Nigeria's national boundaries, especially in Cameroon, carrying out acts that destabilized communities on both sides of the border and disrupted trade between the two countries. In response, Cameroon announced in April that it would increase the presence of its security forces along the border with Nigeria.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. General

16. During the period under review, UNOCA continued to work to strengthen ECCAS capacity in the field of early warning and conflict prevention. UNOCA also focused its work on building synergies with United Nations offices and partner organizations working in Central Africa, with a view to ensuring a coherent response from the United Nations system to the challenges confronting Central Africa.

17. Some priority activities of UNOCA during the reporting period included supporting ECCAS member States to address key peacebuilding challenges in Central Africa, working with member States to enhance maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and supporting international efforts led by the African Union to tackle the threat posed by LRA.

18. In coordinating peace and security issues in the Central Africa subregion, UNOCA consulted broadly among United Nations presences. In this connection, it held its first consultative meeting with the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), in Dakar on 21 December 2011. The meeting focused on issues of common interest to the two subregional offices, including security and terrorism, efforts to combat drug trafficking, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, unemployment affecting young people and the impact of the Libyan crisis on the two subregions.

19. Building on the examples of collaboration between UNOWA and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the two subregional offices exchanged views on ways in which UNOCA could help to enhance the capacity of ECCAS. The two offices agreed to deepen their collaboration and improve information sharing on cross-cutting issues, identifying piracy in the Gulf of Guinea as a matter for specific and immediate collaboration. They also agreed to work together on the recommendations of the December 2011 assessment mission on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region and to define potential joint initiatives on terrorism and the illicit flow of weapons across the two subregions.

20. On the margins of his meetings with UNOWA, my Special Representative for Central Africa also met representatives of United Nations regional offices based in Dakar, covering West and Central Africa. During his discussions with representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, he sought ways in which to strengthen collaboration and cooperation with United Nations system partners in the execution of the mandate of UNOCA.

21. Key common challenges facing the United Nations system in Central Africa include unemployment affecting young people, drug trafficking and transnational crime, the need to improve governance throughout the subregion, the reintegration of ex-combatants in post-conflict countries and meeting the needs of displaced communities. The United Nations is also helping to reinforce the capacity of public administrations and supporting subregional organizations, including ECCAS, to enhance their regional humanitarian preparedness. UNOCA will continue to regularly bring together representatives of regional United Nations offices to consolidate their collaborative efforts, as begun in 2011.

B. Strengthening capacity within subregional organizations to address peace and security challenges

22. ECCAS experienced a transition in leadership during the period under review, with the election of Mr. Nassour Guélengdouksia Ouaidou of Chad as its Secretary-General. In addition, the President of Chad was elected as Chair of ECCAS.

23. In an effort to reinvigorate cooperation between ECCAS and UNOCA, my Special Representative and the Secretary-General of ECCAS signed a framework of cooperation agreement on 3 May 2012, in which are defined priority areas of partnership, such as political governance, mediation support, efforts to combat the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons, and the reinforcement of institutional capacity.

24. Similarly, UNOCA staff members discussed peace and security issues in the Great Lakes region with the secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

C. Preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding

25. UNOCA organized the thirty-third and thirty-fourth ministerial meetings of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa[2] during the period under review. The thirty-third meeting was held from 5 to 9 December 2011 in Bangui and the thirty-fourth from 14 to 18 May 2012 in Bujumbura. The participants reviewed the political and security situations in the subregion; assessed progress on the implementation of various instruments and protocols, including the Code of Conduct for the Defence and Security Forces in Central Africa; assessed progress in efforts to combat criminality; and reviewed the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008) and

[2] The member countries of the Standing Advisory Committee are Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

1888 (2009) on women and peace and security and General Assembly resolution 65/69 on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. At the thirty-fourth meeting, the participants adopted a declaration on a road map for efforts to combat terrorism and for the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa.

26. Encouragingly, the member States of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa have now all signed the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (the Kinshasa Convention), but are yet to ratify it.

D. Piracy and armed robbery at sea committed off the coast of the States of the Gulf of Guinea

27. On 29 February 2012, I presented a report to the Security Council on the assessment mission on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea that I had deployed from 7 to 24 November 2011 (S/2012/45). I urged UNOWA and UNOCA to work together in implementing the recommendations made therein. A key recommendation was for both regional offices to assist affected member States to organize a summit to define a regional anti-piracy strategy for the Gulf of Guinea.

28. UNOCA participated in a maritime safety and security validation meeting held on 28 and 29 March 2012 in Cotonou under the theme "Regional solutions: operational agreements for the safety and security of the maritime domains of West and Central Africa". Co-hosted by ECCAS and ECOWAS, the meeting was aimed at enhancing efforts by subregional organizations to establish working-level maritime cooperation to deal effectively with the peace and security challenges confronting countries in West and Central Africa.

29. Among the proposals being considered in the subregion to deal with maritime insecurity is the establishment in Malabo of a multinational coordination centre for maritime safety and security. Countries are also actively seeking to make operational the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa in Pointe-Noire, the Congo. In addition, some ECCAS member States, such as Cameroon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, have begun formulating national anti-piracy strategies to address the growing challenges that they face.

30. Following a meeting initiated by the United Nations and held in Libreville from 29 to 31 May, a steering committee was set up to lead preparations for a summit of Heads of State and Government on maritime piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea. It comprises experts from ECCAS, ECOWAS, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the African Union, UNOWA and UNOCA. The steering committee's first priority will be to convene a meeting of experts from the Gulf of Guinea countries and interested partners to develop the first draft of the regional strategy.

IV. Lord's Resistance Army

A. Current situation

31. Following a decrease in late 2011, attacks against civilians in LRA-affected areas were again on the rise during the reporting period in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 53 incidents reported in the first quarter of 2012. In Orientale Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone, 33 attacks against civilians presumed to be carried out by LRA were reported. Three people were killed, 51, including 16 children, abducted and more than 4,000 displaced as a result. In the Central African Republic, 20 attacks presumed to be carried out by LRA were reported in the south-east, particularly near the towns of Zemio and Mboki. Six people were reportedly killed and 48 abducted during those attacks, which also led to population displacements, including the movement of 33 refugees from the Central African Republic to Bondo in Orientale Province in March 2012. While no new LRA attacks were reported in South Sudan, 1,316 new refugees fleeing LRA attacks in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo arrived in the country's Western and Central Equatoria states.

32. As at 31 March 2012, more than 445,000 people had been displaced or were living as refugees because of LRA activities in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. There were an estimated 341,000 internally displaced persons in Orientale Province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 6,400 fewer than in December 2011. Some 20,400 internally displaced persons and 5,000 refugees were reported in the Central African Republic. Some 13,000 displaced people returned to their places of origin in Yambio, Nzara, Exo, Mundri and Maridi in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan, where the absence of LRA attacks led to an improved security situation. Some 57,000 people remained displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance in South Sudan, however. There were also some 17,419 Congolese and 1,128 Central African refugees in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.

B. Coordinated response

33. From 3 to 7 January 2012, my Special Representative and the Special Envoy of the African Union for the LRA issue, Francisco Madeira, made a joint visit to the LRA-affected countries to assess progress in efforts to address the threat posed by LRA. They obtained from all stakeholders consulted renewed commitment to the implementation of the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative against LRA.

34. At its meeting on 22 November 2011, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union authorized the Initiative, which was officially launched at a ceremony in Juba on 24 March 2012. My Special Representative for Central Africa attended the ceremony on my behalf. The components of the Initiative are: a joint coordination mechanism with a secretariat in Bangui, chaired by the Peace and Security Commissioner of the African Union and comprising the defence ministers of the four LRA-affected countries; a regional task force comprising 5,000 troops to be contributed by the affected countries; and the headquarters of the regional task force, which includes a joint operations centre located in Yambio, South Sudan. The

regional task force has three sectors, headquartered in Dungu, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Obo, Central African Republic; and Nzara, South Sudan. The costs of maintenance, logistics, equipment and operations are the responsibility of the respective Governments. The institutions are to be closely linked to a joint information operations centre, which is supported by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), located in Dungu in the north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

35. The four LRA-affected countries (the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Uganda) confirmed their willingness to contribute troops to the regional task force and to provide premises for the various components of the Initiative. The political will notwithstanding, the national authorities highlighted implementation challenges, including the need for additional resources, equipment, training, transportation and food rations to enable troops to mount effective operations against LRA.

36. Other challenges remain, including the need to ensure that the armies and Governments of the affected countries are fully prepared to work jointly to counter the LRA threat, both at the political and operational levels. The Initiative itself lacks adequate and predictable funding for its operations. Without the necessary resources, the African Union will be unable to execute this important task fully. The Governments of the affected countries also noted that there was a need to ensure long-term development programmes in the LRA-affected areas to address issues such as lack of State authority and endemic poverty and unemployment, which fuelled the emergence and existence of armed groups. LRA operates in one of the least developed regions in Africa, which lacks basic transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, and meaningful employment opportunities for young people. The four LRA-affected countries and their partners should prioritize development programmes in the affected areas as part of efforts to ensure long-term stability.

37. As requested by the Security Council in its presidential statement of 14 November 2011 (S/PRST/2011/21), UNOCA, in collaboration with the United Nations Office to the African Union, worked with United Nations entities in the LRA-affected region and the African Union to develop a regional strategy on LRA that deals with international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance to the LRA-affected areas. It also aims to promote cross-border mechanisms to improve the protection of civilians, early warning capacity and humanitarian access and response. It addresses issues related to reintegration support for returning internally displaced persons, abductees and former combatants, and recommends international action to strengthen the capacity of the affected countries to extend State authority throughout the areas where LRA has had a presence.

38. Since December 2011, UNOCA has convened meetings with the African Union, United Nations presences in the affected countries and international partners with a view to building consensus on the strategy. The first of two stakeholders' meetings was jointly convened by the African Union and UNOCA on 29 February 2012 at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa. It was attended by representatives of the affected States, bilateral and multilateral partners, concerned countries, including members of the Security Council, and officials of the African Union and the United Nations. A second, expert-level, meeting was held in Entebbe, Uganda, on 22 and 23 March 2012. UNOCA also consulted a broad range of other

stakeholders, including civil society organizations active in the affected areas, in developing the strategy. The strategy, which is being finalized and will be submitted to the Security Council shortly, focuses on five key objectives:

(a) Operationalization and full implementation of the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative against LRA;

(b) Enhancement of efforts to promote the protection of civilians;

(c) Expansion of current disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration activities to cover all LRA-affected areas;

(d) Promotion of a coordinated humanitarian and child protection response in all LRA-affected areas;

(e) Provision of support to LRA-affected Governments in the fields of peacebuilding, human rights, rule of law and development, so as to enable them to establish State authority throughout their territory.

39. United Nations presences in the LRA-affected countries, including the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), MONUSCO and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), together with United Nations country team partners, are developing a regional disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration strategy. The aim of that process is to expand disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration initiatives throughout the LRA-affected areas, in accordance with the Security Council presidential statement of 14 November (S/PRST/2011/21). The missions are working to support national and local Government officials in developing a comprehensive regional disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration approach. Part of this work includes supporting national authorities in developing procedures for repatriating foreign combatants or escapees in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. The rehabilitation and reintegration programme for adult escapees and/or former combatants in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan remains a key concern to be addressed.

C. Humanitarian support to affected regions

40. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations have been providing extensive humanitarian assistance to communities affected by LRA activities in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. The remote and insecure nature of these areas renders it extremely difficult and costly to establish and maintain sustainable humanitarian access. Humanitarian partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo estimated that, as at 1 April 2012, about 25 per cent of internally displaced persons in Haut-Uélé and 45 per cent of internally displaced persons in Bas-Uélé were beyond their reach owing to the high costs of operations in areas with limited road networks and insecurity. During his joint mission with the Special Envoy of the African Union for the LRA issue to the affected countries, my Special Representative for Central Africa visited camps housing refugees and internally displaced persons. Owing to the lack of adequate resources and the inherent security challenges, many displaced persons were living in dire conditions.

41. Over the past 12 months, humanitarian protection and assistance were increased. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, World Food Programme food assistance nearly doubled from 113,400 tons in 2010 to 223,700 tons in 2011 in the LRA-affected areas. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expanded its protection activities and ensured distribution of basic emergency items, including plastic sheeting, sleeping mats, blankets, mosquito nets and kitchen sets. Other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations provided relief items, medical care and agricultural tools and strengthened early warning systems. National and international stakeholders are of the view that this assistance should be extended further, in particular in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and be complemented by early recovery and long-term development assistance.

D. Support from partners

42. Partners continued to provide substantial support to efforts to eliminate the LRA threat and address the impact of the group's activities, particularly in the humanitarian sector. The European Union and the United States of America were the largest contributors. Other key bilateral partners included Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

43. The European Union provided €1.35 million to establish the office of the Special Envoy of the African Union for the LRA issue and to help to implement the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative against LRA. The Union's financial support was also extended to the affected countries, including through contributions to programmes to encourage defections from LRA and the establishment of early warning radio systems to protect vulnerable communities.

44. The European Union and its member States have been implementing development assistance programmes in the LRA-affected countries aimed at strengthening the rule of law, building local governance capacity and reintegrating former LRA members into their home communities. In northern Uganda, the European Union has supported a €87.6 million post-conflict development programme over five years, which has helped to facilitate the return of most of those displaced by LRA activities. The European Union also provided humanitarian assistance to the region, contributing €9 million for this purpose in 2011.

45. In October 2011, the United States began deploying 100 military advisers to the region to provide logistical, intelligence, training and other forms of support to national armies engaged in operations against LRA. The advisers were deployed as part of United States efforts under the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009, passed by the United States Congress in May 2010. They are also coordinating and sharing information with the national armies operating in the affected areas. In April 2012, the United States Government announced that, following a 150-day review, it would maintain the presence of the military advisers in the affected countries beyond the initial six-month period.

46. The United States continued to support BINUCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS to strengthen their efforts in the LRA-affected areas. As part of efforts to protect civilians, the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development have been funding communication networks, including high-

frequency radios and cell phone towers, to enhance community-based protection in Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé, Democratic Republic of the Congo. As the largest bilateral donor of humanitarian assistance to LRA-affected populations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, in the fiscal year 2011 the United States provided more than $18 million to support the provision of food assistance and implementation of food security, humanitarian protection, health and livelihood initiatives, in addition to other relief activities.

E. Country-specific activities

Central African Republic

47. As part of efforts to coordinate their actions, the Government and its partners, including the United Nations, the African Union, France, the United States and the ECCAS-led Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic, established an LRA working group. BINUCA was designated as the focal point on the LRA issue. Representatives of BINUCA visited their United Nations counterparts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Dungu and Goma) as part of efforts to improve inter-mission coordination and enhance information sharing. The visit also provided an opportunity for BINUCA and MONUSCO to share best practices, in particular in the area of repatriation and promoting defections among LRA members. BINUCA, in cooperation with MONUSCO and UNMISS, has been exploring options on how best to support the Government in developing a mechanism to facilitate the repatriation of LRA defectors to their countries of origin.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

48. MONUSCO continued to implement military and non-military measures to address the LRA threat, in coordination with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in consultation with other partners. Between 18 December 2011 and 2 January 2012, MONUSCO and the Congolese armed forces conducted joint military operations in Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé. By establishing additional forward bases and conducting extensive patrols, the operation aimed to enhance security in the LRA-affected areas during the period. In addition, from 28 January to 16 April 2012, MONUSCO conducted five distinct military operations to reinforce the protection of civilians in areas under threat in Haut-Uélé.

49. On 6 February 2012, MONUSCO launched Operation Welcome Peace in support of its disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration programmes, aimed at encouraging defection and surrender by LRA combatants. The operation is expected to continue until the end of 2012. Furthermore, in April 2012, the Mission deployed new forward bases in Buta and Ango, in Bas-Uélé. In May 2012, MONUSCO and the Congolese armed forces jointly conducted Operation Iron Fist to deter LRA activities in Haut-Uélé, Orientale Province. Meanwhile, Congolese forces continued to carry out military operations against LRA in Garamba National Park.

50. In the area of early warning, MONUSCO continued to support the establishment of community alert networks in Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé, enabling communities to inform local authorities and/or MONUSCO of an impending or actual attack. As at 4 May 2012, 40 high-frequency radios had been installed within communities in the LRA-affected areas as part of the initiative. MONUSCO

engineering units are also rehabilitating the Dungu-Duru and the Faradje-Durba roads to improve access to and facilitate trade within the area.

51. During the reporting period, cooperation between the Congolese armed forces and the Ugandan People's Defence Force decreased, with all Ugandan combat units leaving the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the end of 2011. During a regular meeting on 14 and 15 March 2012 in Kinshasa in which MONUSCO participated as an observer, however, the ministers of defence, the chiefs of general staff and the military intelligence chiefs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda agreed that there was a need to enhance coqperation and information sharing related to LRA.

South Sudan

52. During the period under review, UNMISS continued to support the extension of the MONUSCO regional LRA communication strategy (linking radio networks in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Uganda). This included assisting MONUSCO-led efforts to expand radio broadcasting of "coming home" programmes from Western Equatoria State into strategic LRA crossing points in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, with a view to facilitating desertion and regional repatriation strategies. The office of the UNMISS Western Equatoria State Coordinator continued to facilitate the distribution of MONUSCO awareness-raising material in relation to LRA. UNMISS continued integrated civilian and military patrols and information gathering in the LRA-affected areas.

53. Although formal mechanisms have not yet been developed for the repatriation of non-Sudanese adult escapees from LRA, UNMISS continued to collaborate with South Sudanese national authorities, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and MONUSCO to facilitate periodic repatriation. Meanwhile, UNMISS continued to work with key partners to formalize a protocol on LRA repatriation.

Uganda

54. In northern Uganda, the recovery trend has been encouraging. Significant progress has been observed, including through the return and reintegration of formerly displaced persons, with only 4 of the original 251 camps for internally displaced persons still operating. Agricultural production has increased and local government capacity improved.

55. Factors that could derail progress remain, however, including economic disparities, land tenure irregularities, high levels of unemployment among young people and increasing frustration among populations who held high hopes for the dividends of peace. Through a Peacebuilding Fund project jointly implemented by eight United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, efforts are under way to address some of those challenges by providing specialized reintegration and integration assistance for female-headed, internally displaced, returnee and ex-combatant households in the region. The programme has also been providing psychosocial support and interim care, supporting the reunification of children formerly associated with armed groups and other children affected by violence.

56. OHCHR and the Peacebuilding Fund assisted the Government to develop transitional justice mechanisms in conformity with international human rights standards. Among others, the projects support capacity-building for mediation, peacebuilding and conflict resolution at the local level, and the Government's affirmative action plan for the subregion under its peace, recovery and development plan for northern Uganda (2012-2015).

57. In November 2011, OHCHR, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Refugee Law Project of Makerere University convened a national consultation meeting on the Amnesty Act of 2000, focusing on the right to justice of victims of the LRA conflict and the human rights implications of a blanket amnesty. At that meeting, victims' organizations, women's organizations and State authorities shared their experiences with regard to crimes committed by LRA and their views on the Amnesty Act and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme carried out by the Amnesty Commission. Women's organizations and representatives of the victims, in particular, were of the view that accountability and truth-telling must be ensured by the State and that the Amnesty Act required at least a review and further discussion.

58. In April 2012, the United Nations system in Uganda and Gulu University organized a research conference on perceptions of peacebuilding in northern Uganda that brought together national and international scholars and practitioners in the field. It was aimed at strengthening Gulu University as a key peacebuilding institution in the region. The participants agreed on several policy recommendations that would feed into the second version of the Government's peace, recovery and development plan for northern Uganda (2012-2015).

V. Observations

59. I am encouraged by the efforts of a growing number of States in the region to improve their electoral rules and procedures to allow broader popular participation. I commend those countries that conducted peaceful elections and effected orderly transfers of political power, and call upon States in the region to address the remaining legal and administrative gaps to ensure transparent, participatory and inclusive elections.

60. While I commend the Central Africa subregion on the impressive economic growth rates during the past year, the challenge now is to translate such growth into tangible gains for the majority of the people in the subregion. In this regard, I regret that economic growth in many countries in the region has not yet resulted in a real decline in poverty. To attain the Millennium Development Goals, I call upon States in the region to accelerate efforts to ensure pro-poor growth that benefits the majority of the populations without discrimination. UNOCA stands ready to support States in this regard. To promote participatory and non-discriminatory approaches to socioeconomic development, I further encourage States in the region to strengthen their national human rights architecture, including national human rights institutions, and to continue to seek technical assistance from OHCHR in this regard.

61. I welcome the recent decision by the Lake Chad Basin Commission to take specific measures to combat the threat posed by Boko Haram. I encourage the member countries of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa to deliver on their commitment to work together to

establish a coherent strategy against illicit arms and ammunition in the subregion. The United Nations remains ready to assist subregional efforts to enhance peace and security, and to mobilize the international community to provide the necessary support in this regard.

62. I am encouraged by the efforts of the member States of ECCAS and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community to put in place mechanisms for integration and cross-border cooperation, including those promoting the free movement of people throughout the subregion. As noted by the member States themselves, however, the pace of implementation of the relevant protocols needs to be accelerated if they are to bear fruit. Such mechanisms are the building blocks for enhanced cooperation.

63. Piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea remain a major challenge. I note the continuing collaboration between the Gulf of Guinea Commission, ECCAS, ECOWAS and the African Union, with support from UNOCA and UNOWA, to implement the recommendations in Security Council resolution 2039 (2012), including through the organization of a summit of Heads of State and Government on the issue. I urge the affected States in the Gulf of Guinea to continue to pursue their efforts to address this most worrisome phenomenon promptly and effectively. I also call upon their partners to continue to support them in this critical endeavour.

64. I am encouraged by the growing cooperation among stakeholders working to eliminate the threat posed by LRA. I call upon the international community to support the implementation of a coordinated regional strategy to address the threat and the impact of LRA activities, including through disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration efforts. Only by providing the necessary resources will we be able to ensure the success of continuing efforts by the national authorities, the African Union and other international partners in this regard.

65. In conclusion, I should like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the Central African countries, ECCAS, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other subregional and regional institutions for their close cooperation with UNOCA. I also wish to acknowledge the support and cooperation that UNOCA has received from the various United Nations bodies working in Central Africa, namely the United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other relevant entities, for their cooperation with UNOCA. Lastly, I should like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative and the staff of UNOCA for their continued efforts to advance peace and security in Central Africa.